

MOD C STUDY NOTES

'That Crafty Feeling' – Zadie Smith

Text Type: Non-fiction

Zadie Smith is an accomplished contemporary English novelist, essayist, and short-story writer.

This piece of writing started out as a lecture that Smith delivered to students as part of a Columbia University writing program in 2008. Via lecture, Smith outlines her ten rules for writing, carefully pointing out the subjectivity and self-consciousness of her approach, and ensuring that the audience is aware of the key differences between a writer's arbitrary ten rules and an academic's. The piece is easily-read and relatively straightforward (perhaps owing to its origin as a spoken piece) but also illuminating in giving insight into what an established and critically appraised author really thinks about their own writing. Smith discusses her own personal approach to the craft of writing, and as such it becomes perfect fodder for both looking at the rubric for this part of the syllabus and looking at how a writer disseminates ideas in relation to this.

Language tech.	Evidence
Personal anecdotes (features of a discursive piece)	We know smith has authority (novelist) but does not explicitly state this → feature of discursive

From the beginning we see the terms of her mind → “I want to offer you a pair of ugly terms for two breeds of novelist: the Macro Planner and Micro Manager,”

“Breeds” → imagery, figurative language device → metaphor to describe the two ways people can write

“Personally, I’m a Micro Manager. I start at the first sentence of a novel and I finish at the last. It would never occur to me to choose between three different endings because I haven’t the slightest idea what the ending is until I get to it, a fact that will surprise no one who has read my novels.”

“Macro Planners have their houses largely built from day one, and so their obsession is internal”

“Micro Managers build a house by floor by floor, discretely and in it's entirety” → reference to house builders → metaphor

“This induces a special breed of pathology for which I have another ugly name: OPD or obsessive perspective disorder.” → allusion of OCD

“my OPD spun completely out of control: I reworked those twenty pages for almost two years. To look back at all past work induced nausea, but the first twenty pages in particular bring on heart palpitations. It’s like taking a tour of a cell in which you were once incarcerated.” → simile

Through this we gain her perspective and we see how a novelist can become obsessed with their writing process and how it can effect them

Throughout the text we see a variation in sentence types → this helps to engage the reader as well as draw attention to and emphasise specific points e.g. “Yet while OPD is happening, somehow the work of the rest of the novel gets done. That the strange thing.”

“Recently I came across a new quote. It’s my screen saver now, my little scrap of confidence as I try to write a novel. It is a thought of Derrida’s and very simple: If a right to a secret is not maintained then we are in a utilitarian space” → see her personal anecdotes – literary allusion and intertextuality

Smith offers her own perspective and view by providing personal anecdotes and using first person language → repetition of ‘I’ and ‘I’m’

- “My writing desk is covered in open novels. I read lines to swim in a certain sensibility.... To encourage rigour when I’m too sentimental, to bring verbal ease when I’m syntactically uptight. I think of reading like a balanced diet.”

“For five years I had a line from Gravity’s Rainbow stuck to my door:

We have to find meters whose scales are unknown in the world, draw our own schematics, getting feedback, making connections, reducing the error, trying to learn the real function.... Zeroing in on what incalculable plot?”

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“A new novel, begun in hope and enthusiasm, grows shameful and strange to it's author soon enough. After each book is done, you look forward to hating it (and you never have to wait long)” → shows that writing is not an easy process – can be traumatic for the author

Zadie Smith sources other writers work for inspiration etc. → by using alliteration and intertextuality it shows hoe she is an experienced and knowledgeable writer:

“Think of that revelation Shakespeare put in the mouth of King John: ‘Now my soul has elbow room!’”

Additionally, the 3rd section is titled 'Other Peoples Worlds, Part two' → explores other writers and how they can impact personal writing process → forming different perspectives

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"I can't tell you how many times I've sat backstage with a line of novelists at some festival, all of us with red pens in hand, frantically editing our published novels the perfect state of mind to edit your own novel is two years after its published."

"I find it very hard to read my books after they're published.... I tried.... I was overwhelmed with nausea"

When referring to reading her own book: "The book was genuinely strange to me; there were whole pages I didn't recognise, didn't remember writing. And because it was so strange I didn't feel any particular animosity towards it. so that

	was that: between that book and me there ow exists a sort of black truce, neither pleasant or unpleasant.”
‘offer not a demand’ (features of a discursive piece)	Offer not a demand → “What I have to say about craft extends no further than my own experience....” “You can ignore everything else in this lecture except number eight.”
Use of similes:	“It’s as if you’re winding the key of a toy car tighter and tighter... When you finally let it go, it travels at a crazy speed.” → USE OF SIMILE AND ELLIPSIS → through her writing we can imagine the winding occur and what it feels like
Use of metaphor:	“Other’s people’s words are the bridge you use to cross” → metaphor
Use of intertextuality:	“For five years I had a line from Gravity’s Rainbow stuck to my door: We have to find meters whose scales are unknown in the world, draw our own schematics, getting feedback, making connections, reducing the error, trying to learn the real function.... Zeroing in on what incalculable plot?” “Recently I came across a new quote. It’s my screen saver now, my little scrap of confidence as I try to write a novel. It is a thought of Derrida’s and very simple: If a right to a secret is not maintained then we are in a utilitarian space” → see her personal anecdotes – literary allusion and intertextuality

	<p>“Keats offers his readers the possibility of entering writing from a side door..... for Keats went about his work like an apprentice..... A suburban, lower-middle-class boy, a few steps removed from the literary scene..... he devoured influences.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “offering” → similar to what Smith is doing – offering - Keats did not come from a rich background but still wrote beautifully - “devoured influences” → take on ideas – how we write <p>Zadie Smith sources other writers work for inspiration etc. → by using alliteration and intertextuality it shows hoe she is an experienced and knowledgeable writer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Think of that revelation Shakespeare put in the mouth of King John: ‘Now my soul has elbow room!’” ○ Additionally, the 3rd section is titled ‘Other Peoples Worlds, Part two’ → explores other writers and how they can impact personal writing process → forming different perspectives <p>“For how can you pipe out your little mouse song when Kafka’s Josephine the Mouse Singer pipes so much more loudly and beautifully than you ever could?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making them question their writing → using intertextuality to do so
Variation in sentence types:	<p>“Some writers won’t read a word of any novel while they’re writing their own. Not one word.” → emphasising her point –</p>

	shows how the writing process can be traumatic and often hard for people
Humour:	<p>“I mean there is nothing in the world except your book, and even as your wife tells you she’s sleeping with your brother he face is a gigantic semi-colon, her arms are parentheses and you are wondering whether rummage is a better word than rifle. The middle of a novel is a state of mind. Strange things happen in it. Time collapses.” → humour to show how completely immersed she’s become in writing → removed herself from the world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of short sentences to place emphasis <p>“if it isn’t published next Tuesday may be the moment will pass and you will have to kill yourself” → humour through hyperbole</p>
Use of Puns:	“That’s why proofs are so cruel, so sad: the existence of the proof itself is proof that it is already too late.”
‘Micro Manager and Macro Planner’/Extended Metaphor:	<p>From the beginning we see the terms of her mind → “I want to offer you a pair of ugly terms for two breeds of novelist: the Macro Planner and Micro Manager,”</p> <p>“Breeds” → imagery, figurative language device → metaphor to describe the two ways people can write</p> <p>“Macro Planners have their houses largely built from day one, and so their obsession is internal”</p> <p>“Micro Managers build a house by floor by floor, discretely and in it's entirety” → reference to house builders → metaphor</p>

	<p>“There is one great advantage to being a Micro Manager rather than a Macro Planner: the last day of your novel is truly the last day. If you edit as you go along, there are no first, second, third drafts. There is only one draft, and when it's done, it's done.”</p>
Imagery:	<p>“When building a novel you will use a lot of scaffolding. Some of this is necessary to hold the things up, but most isn't.”</p> <p>“Each time I've written a long piece of fiction I've felt the need for an enormous amount of scaffolding..... scaffolding holds up confidence when you have none, reduced the despair, creates a goal – however artificial – and end point.... Use it to divide what seems like an endless, unmarked journey, though by doing this, like Zeno, you indefinitely extend the distance you need to go.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Zeno wrote a lot of paradoxes – use of allusion to contradict scaffolding - Smith is making us question whether we need scaffolding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Late in the novel, in the last quarter, when I am rolling downhill, I turn back to reads those first twenty pages. They are packed tighter than tuna in a can.” ○ “It's awful, the swing of the literary fraudulence pendulum: from moment to moment you can't decide whether you're the fraudulent idiot or your reader is the fraudulent idiot.” → humour and imagery to show the importance of not spoon-feeding readers

	<p>“it was sunny, late autumn, and there were apples everywhere, overripe and stinky.” → through imagery we see the importance of this moment (finishing a book) → the smell will forever evoke this feeling</p>
Metaphor and figurative language:	<p>“character occurs with the lightest of brushstrokes”</p> <p>“Some writers are the kind of solo violinists who need complete silence to tune their instruments. Others want to hear every member of the orchestra – they’ll take a cue from a clarinet, from an oboe, even.”</p>
Advice when writing:	<p>“When you finish your novel, if money is not a desperate priority, if you do not need to sell it at once or be published that very second – <i>put it in a drawer</i>. For as long as you can manage. A year or more is ideal – but even three months will do. <i>Step away from the vehicle</i>. The secret to editing your work is simple: you need to become its reader instead of its writer.”</p>

'What Time Is It Now, Where You Are?' – Colum McCann

Text Type: Prose Fiction

- The text has a meta-fictional nature → commenting on its own structure, way it's created etc.
- There is a narrative embedded within the overall narrative
- The narrator has some autobiographical features/elements → we see McCann through him

Language tech etc.	Evidence
Cold as a motif - Cold as a motif sets the character and, how she sees herself	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ "sitting on the edge of a valley, in the cold..... in the vast quiet, looking eastward, under a steel mesh of stars... not even the thrup of machine-gun fire in the distance, the grim perimeter of the soldier's reality."○ "the darkness made again more visible by the layer of frost covering everything.....with everything so cold.... Sandi's eyelashes have frozen and her lungs feel thick with ice..... her teeth chatter so much that she is afraid she might chip them" → the use of long sentences (lasting a half page) was a deliberate decision by the narrator – way to emphasises the feeling Sandi is experiencing → tone is bleak, sombre and brutal○ "it freezes Sandi in her cube of human loneliness." → we can see the walls around herself – trapped and imprisonment

Metaphors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “a small parcel of meaning.” → to show what readers want ○ “malevolent little slice of censorship”
Metafiction	<p>Use of anaphora of ‘say’ and other comments show how he constructs his story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “a young American, say, in a distant land. He could find himself, say, in a barracks on New Years Eve in Afghanistan..... lets say a young woman” → repetition of ‘say’ = meta-fictive comments on the story he’s creating → through this we see the boundaries of the two stories blur ○ “say, at home in South Carolina, say, a relentless suburb of no great distinction, say, a house gone slightly sour with the years, say, a broken drainpipe hanging down from the garage, say...” → the author is putting himself in different situations → similar to what McCann does ○ “Looking out into the Afghan night – although it would be better to be specific, and she could be facing the gothic dark of the Kerengal Valley, maybe even the ridge over Loi Kolay Village” → shows his research into the process of writing ○ “Sandi sits alone in her rocky outpost. Unlikely of course, but he knows a few Marines back in New York, and he has heard their stories, and he is well aware that reality so often trumps invention.” → shows how context influences writing ○ “he justifies her aloneness with the idea that a New Year’s Eve party is taking place in the village barracks below.....

Sandi is decent, Sandi is cool, Sandi knows the score, and, lets be honest, Sandi likes her privacy” → The long sentence allows the reader to get caught up in the story – this is broken by the meta-fictive comment and authorial intrusion which reminds us of his creative process as a writer

- “(He has, he must admit, no idea yet.)”
- “the sense of cold seclusion is important: not only because it is a New Year’s Eve story, but because it freezes Sandi in her cube of human loneliness.”
- “the reader must begin to feel the cold.... We should feel our own eyelashes freeze..... but at least a resolve of some sort, a small parcel of meaning.” → extended sentence and metaphors to show his writing process and his thought process
- “he wants now to capture the essence of what it feels like to be far from home, to be in two or three places all at once.... What we really need on New Year’s Eve is a sense of return, whether to his own original Dublin, or to Sandi’s Charleston, or to his New York, or Sandi’s birthplace which is, let’s say, Ohio” → we understand the voice (narrator) – we see his stream of consciousness through meta-fictive comments → we are involved in the writing process
- “He wants desperately to create gunfire across the Afghan hills, or to see a streak of light that is not just a metaphor”

	<p>→ idea of overuse of imagery → can detract from the story</p> <p>– reminding us of techniques writers use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “to force a tracerline across the reader’s brain, to ignite alternative fireworks on the eve of the new year.... No matter what he imagines.... He has an inkling now of what she might say to her sin, or rather Kimberlee’s son.” ○ “or he could return to Afghanistan, or he could slide into the past, or he could follow Joel.... or he could descend down to the hill.... Or he could follow the path of a satellite, or he could go back to Sandi’s original lover, or he could summon in the snow...” → reminding us of possibilities ○ “how is it that a particle of voice gets transmitted down a telephone line? How is it that Sandi summons up a single phrase..... How is it that Kimberlee hears and sound and already her hand is moving through space to reach for the white kitchen telephone? How is it that Joel feels a pang of desire for Tracey?”
Rhetorical questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “perhaps it could happen again, a leak of light from her satellite phone this time?..... what sort of New Year’s story might that be anyway? → see his thought process and disregarding ideas ○ “what might happen if she doesn’t get to talk to him? What happens if the line goes dead? What happens if a shot rings out in the night?” ○ “how is it that a particle of voice gets transmitted down a telephone line? How is it that Sandi summons up a single

	<p>phrase..... How is it that Kimberlee hears and sound and already her hand is moving through space to reach for the white kitchen telephone? How is it that Joel feels a pang of desire for Tracey?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Could he disappear back to them? What was that song his father used to sing?"
Imagery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "she aces for the call"
Similes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "The stars themselves like bulletholes above her." → reminding us of setting → helps building tension
Subverting stereotypes / Raising contemporary issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "After a few days he decides against it - it would be far too simple to embrace the ease of death by sniper fire" → subverting stereotypes ○ "but first he must talk to his second mother in Afghanistan from the kitchen of his first mother's house." → subverting stereotypes → raising contemporary issues through setting
Personification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "layers of black pressing down on the already dark mountains" ○ "where even the stunted trees might seem as if they want to step off the cliffs"